

1 **TRANSCRIPT OF REMARKS MADE BY CAPTAIN JOSEPH TULLY, USN**

2 Former Commanding Officer USS Saratoga

3 Speech to USS Liberty survivors gathered in San Diego

4 for the LVA's 28th anniversary reunion

5 At approximately 2:00PM on 8 June 1967, in international waters near the Sinai
6 Peninsula, the USS Liberty, a United States intelligence gathering ship, was attacked by
7 Israeli aircraft and motor torpedo boats. The attack seriously damaged Liberty and
8 killed 34 crewmen while seriously wounding one hundred seventy-one, one of whom
9 has subsequently died as a result of his wounds.

10 At that time, I was the commanding officer of the American aircraft carrier Sara-
11 toga which was operating as a part of the Sixth Fleet Carrier Striking Force in the vicin-
12 ity of the Greek Island of Crete. This force consisted of:

13 Flagship: Vice Admiral William I. Martin, Commander Sixth Fleet, in a cruiser.

14 Cruiser: Rear Admiral Roger Payne embarked.

15 USS America: A new aircraft carrier, I believe on its first Mediterranean cruise,
16 command by Captain Don Engen.

17 Embarked was Rear Admiral Larry Geis, Commander, Carrier Division Four.

18 In addition, there were about a dozen escorting destroyer type ships providing
19 various services. Vice Admiral Martin was Senior Officer Present Afloat and was con-
20 ducting various maneuvers.

21 About this time, Saratoga's Communications Officer personally delivered to me
22 on the bridge a message. This in itself was unusual and denoted that it was something
23 of importance. The text of this message was in plain language, not encrypted:

24 From: USS Liberty

25 To: Any or all US ships or stations

26 "Liberty is under attack by unknown enemy air and surface units. Request Assis-
27 tance."
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1 The communications officer assured me they had authenticated Liberty's mes-
2 sage, proving its veracity.

3 At this time, Saratoga and I thought America also was in a state of readiness -
4 ready to launch at least nine aircraft of various types loaded with 500 pound all-purpose
5 bombs and ready machine guns, steam to the catapults, aircraft spotted for launch and
6 pilots standing by.

7 A check with the navigation officer (now Rear Admiral Max K. Morris, USN, re-
8 tired), revealed that we were only 15 to 20 minutes flight time distance from USS Liberty
9 and could be of immediate assistance.

10 I personally called Vice Admiral Martin via our primary tactical radio circuit, read
11 him our Liberty message and added, "Unless otherwise directed, I plan to launch my
12 Ready Strike Group in support of Liberty."

13 Vice Admiral Martin voice approved my intention and directed America to launch
14 her Ready Strike Group also. Actually, Saratoga made launch of 12 vice the expected
15 nine aircraft.

16 While the aircraft were still in sight I noted that America did not launch. About the
17 same time Saratoga's aircraft were in rendezvous, Rear Admiral Geis in America re-
18 called the aircraft with instructions not to jettison their 500 pound bombs. This created a
19 problem for Saratoga, but fortunately there was a NATO Ammo Depot in Crete which
20 was nearby, and so four of Saratoga's aircraft were diverted to NATO Ammo Depot and
21 airfield. Meanwhile, Vice Admiral Martin ordered another strike sortie in support of Lib-
22 erty at about 1500, which was accomplished, only again to be recalled by Rear Admiral
23 Geis, with again some of Saratoga's aircraft being diverted to Crete for unloading.

24 The Sixth Fleet Strike Force remained together for about two more days, then
25 was split up with each carrier getting a cruiser and several destroyers in routine opera-
26 tions.

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1 In September, 1967, Saratoga had a routine visit to Athens, Greece. While there
2 I was relieved by Captain John Dick, who ironically knew nothing about the incident. My
3 assignment was the Captain Aviator Assignment Detailer at the Bureau of Naval Per-
4 sonnel in Washington.

5 It was not until I noted Lieutenant Commander Ennes's book *Assault on the Lib-*
6 *erty* which I obtained from the Naval Institute that I learned what actually happened.

7 Rear Admiral Kidd was about this time directed to conduct a classified inspection
8 of the communications situation of the Mediterranean. I do not think he had expertise in
9 the communications area, particularly that pertaining to intelligence matters, though he
10 did manage to frighten those he interviewed. He did not interview me, though we were
11 classmates at the Naval Academy -- and not friendly.

12 Of the other major participants, Rear Admiral Geis died not too long after the in-
13 cident from hepatitis following hip replacement. Vice Admiral Martin has suffered a
14 cerebral stroke and is incapable of being a coherent witness.

15 Both Captains Engen of America and Tully of Saratoga are alive but have not
16 been queried in any way about the affair.

17 Last but not least, this is the only incident of damage to a major U.S. ship since
18 the sinking of the USS Maine in Havana Harbor in 1898, prior to the Spanish-American
19 War, that has not been investigated by the U.S. Congress, and this must tell something.

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